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April 22, 1999

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Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Re: Docket # 98N-1038, "Irradiation in the Production, Processing, and Handling of Food"

To whom it may concern:

The FDA must retain the current labeling law, the current terminology of "treated with radiation" or "treated by irradiation," and the use of the radura symbol on all irradiated whole foods. In its initial petition regarding irradiation labeling, the FDA concluded that irradiation was a "material fact" concerning the processing of a food, and thus should be disclosed. This material fact remains; therefore, labeling must remain.

Consumer acceptability, storage qualities and nutrients are all affected by irradiation. Some irradiated foods have different texture and spoilage characteristics from untreated foods. Most fruits and vegetables have nutrient losses that are neither obvious nor expected by the consumer. In addition, processing by irradiation causes chemical changes that are not evident and are potentially hazardous. Meat may have a higher level of carcinogenic benzene. All irradiated foods contain unique radiolytic products that have never been tested.

Whether or not the FDA has approved irradiation as safe, it remains a new technology with no long-term human feeding studies. U.S. Consumers must retain the right to know if this process has been used on their food.

As to the kind of label used, it is essential that the label be large enough to be readily visible to the consumer, and positioned prominently on the front of the package. The label contains important information regarding the processing of the contents. For displayed whole foods such as produce, a prominent informational display similar to that used for meats should be used (but containing the term "irradiation" and the radura symbol).

I support the recommendation by the Center for Science in the Public Interest regarding labeling of irradiated foods:

"Any foods, or any foods containing ingredients that have been treated by irradiation, should be labeled with a written statement on the principal display panel indicating such treatment. The statement should be easy to read and placed in close proximity to the name of the food and accompanied by the international symbol. If the food is unpackaged, this information should be clearly displayed on a poster in plain view and adjacent to where the product is displayed for sale."

Like other labels, irradiation labels are required by FDA to be truthful and not misleading. I believe that the terms "treated with radiation" or "treated by irradiation" must be retained. Any phrase involving the word "pasteurization" is misleading because pasteurization is an entirely different process of rapid heating and cooling.

I recognize the radura symbol as information regarding a material fact of food processing. The requirement for irradiation disclosure (both label and radura symbol) should not expire at any time in the future. Even if some consumers become familiar with the radura symbol, new consumers (e.g., young people, immigrants) will not be. Every effort should be made to ensure that the labeling be clearly understandable, be located at the point of purchase, and be meaningful for everyone. If there is no label, consumers will be misled into believing the food has not been irradiated.

It is my understanding that Ms. Patricia Hansen at your offices has stated that comments by e-mail are accepted but discouraged because if the e-mail is garbled it will be discarded. Furthermore, Ms. Hansen has stated that it is the policy of the FDA not to post comments regarding this matter to the Internet. Ms. Hansen is quoted as citing staffing problems as the reason for this policy. This is an urgent issue that requires as much input and participation as possible in order for the FDA

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to make a decision that reflects the will of all stakeholders. Immediate and open exchange of information will only enhance this process. I urge you to post on the Internet all comments received regarding this matter so that all stakeholders can be publicly and efficiently informed about whom is participating in this comment process.

Most importantly, because this technology is in its infancy and because of the necessity to carefully assess the public health effects of widespread use of irradiated foods, the FDA's labeling requirement should not be permitted to expire. I look forward to your written response regarding the status of this matter.

Respectfully,



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